Trust – a 'new' institution to improve urban governance

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Abstract

With a participatory turn in planning having happened over a decade ago it is time to reflect on whether participation has delivered something new or whether it is simply more of the same with new labels. When we look at many of these participatory planning institutions against Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, many of these new planning approaches were/are hardly new. There are very few planning authorities that are willing to redistribute their resources and the power that can be exercised from mobilizing these resources to enable citizen power. However, where some effort has been made to go beyond the 'informing' and 'consultation' rungs on the ladder, there is some evidence that these moves that incorporate community engagement can help develop trust. There may be anecdotal evidence that the farther one climbs up the ladder towards citizen power, the stronger the trust that can be developed.

The central theme of this paper is that through the development of mutual trust between communities and planning authorities, appropriate, quality and legitimate planning decisions can be made and implemented.

This work delves deeper into the institutional and governance aspects of the work by Edwards (2009) looking at how power and trust work in participatory planning exercises. Data has been collected through documentary analyses and follow up narrative interviews with selected actors involved in planning and community on the Gold Coast, Australia.

The author expects that by looking at participation through the lens of trust, will provide another perspective on collaborative planning other than power (c.f. Flyvbjerg 2003). While Stein & Harper (2003) claim that a focus on power can reduce trust, I believe that it detracts from the attention that trust deserves, particularly the role that trust plays in improving democratic legitimacy.

Keywords: trust, participation, power, democratic legitimacy, planning decisions

Introduction

Participation in urban planning has variously been called participatory planning, collaborative planning, and community engagement, among others. It has gained prominence over the past few decades from theoretical and practical perspectives – new tools for practitioners to developments on its fundamental basis in Habermas' communicative action theory, such as the work of Iris Marion Young. As Head

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(2007) notes, this is partially due to the insufficiency of formal institutionalized democracy as we know it. Participatory planning has been used at local, regional and national scales with varying levels of success, no matter what the scale. While there have been many participatory successes at varying spatial scales, there are many more participatory processes that have failed and further contributed to the divide between citizens, stakeholders and government (c.f. Innes & Booher, 2004).

While participation, and in particular meaningful participation, may have failed innumerable communities, there may still be hope that through conceptualizing the research undertaken in participation, there is hope that communities can once again feel that their governments have their best interests at heart. Through looking at trust and how the power relations in participatory planning processes relate to it (trust), it would appear to provide a productive way forward in planning governance. By developing trust between citizens, stakeholders and government agencies, even the limited way in which participatory processes are carried out may be able to improve planning processes and legitimacy.

The paper will set out what participation is, what ideal participation hoped to achieve and predominantly discuss how participation has failed. The failure of participation will be linked with the concept of legitimacy and how participatory planning has been unable to deliver legitimate planning outcomes. Legitimacy is also linked to the idea of trust. Trust will be explored, first introducing it, how it can be considered an institution and finally how trust as an institution can be used as a governance framework to develop legitimate planning decisions.

Participation and its failures

Wade Davis (2001) noted that "Every view of the world that fades away, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life and reduces the human repertoire of adaptive responses to the problems that face us all". While this speaks to a specific way that participation can provide a benefit to society, it has also been held up to provide a range of broader benefits. These benefits include good governance, modernizing government, and addressing a democratic deficit found in representational democracy and improving legitimacy of decisions and providing a better picture of what is happening in communities and neighbourhoods (Curtain, 2004; Nicholson, 2005; Edwards et al., 2008; Nienhuis et al., 2011). Innes and Booher (2004) further note that there are five purposes of participation, including allowing decision-makers to find out what the public wants, incorporating local knowledge, fairness and justice, legitimacy and legal requirements.

While some authors (ASR Research & Red Road Consulting, 2002; Giessen, 2008; Edwards, 2009) among many note that participation has delivered numerous benefits to citizens and communities, including additional or improved information, a dialogue between government and citizens/stakeholders (Head, 2007), deliberation between stakeholders, improving understandings between groups with differing interests ( ).

While Head (2007) notes that participatory democratic theory assumes that positive outcomes come from participation, there are numerous critiques of how participation has failed communities and neighbourhoods. Innes & Booher (2004) and Cheng & Mattor (2006) note that one of the root causes of failure is through having rigid, legally mandated participation. These rigid, legal requirements often result in the coordinating government agency 'going through the motions' to satisfy the requirement, while not concerned at all about the input from citizens and stakeholders. Additionally, the amount of time that these processes can take (approximately two years in several local government and almost eight years in a state government cases in Australia) (Edwards, 2009) make them unattractive to both governments and citizens and stakeholders, in addition to possibly ending in poor decisions (Innes & Booher, 2004).

Participation, therefore has overall not delivered on the grand promises made, simply 'greenwashing' over traditional styles of government policy and planning. Maginn (2007) notes that information sharing and data collection did not provide any meaningful participation from citizens and stakeholders in Perth nor did just going through the legal motions in Colorado (Cheng & Mattor, 2006).

Nienhuis et al. (2011) indirectly note that participation can fail in two distinct ways when they claim that process design and lifestyle choices affect participation. The first is through failure of the process, where the process employed has failed to work 'properly' (i.e. incorporating bias, exclusion, lack of independence, agenda control by policy-makers, etc.) (Head, 2007; Maginn, 2007; Bond & Thompson-Fawcett, 2007). The second way in which participation fails is through simply 'bad' participation. This is where citizens and stakeholders simply do not participate – through lack of time or connection to the community (Nienhuis et al., 2011), being out of touch with political and economic realities (Innes & Booher, 2004) or where the organising agency does not identify or reach 'hard to reach' groups (Bond & Thompson-Fawcett, 2007).

These failures of participation have led, in part, to a decrease in legitimacy of participatory processes. Beetham (1991) notes that legitimacy is derived both through process and norms – focusing on the process, it therefore must be inclusive and have outcomes that are binding on decision-makers. In many cases, neither of these criteria are met, making plans illegitimate in the eyes of citizens and stakeholders.

The failures of participation have led to unhappy experiences on the part of the citizens and stakeholders (Head, 2007) and letting the public believe that government at all levels is unresponsive to their concerns (Innes & Booher, 2004). They also note that citizens may not be in touch with the long-term outlook, political and economic realities of the area, however, it can be noted that politicians (who, in some cases, 'control' the planners, c.f. Edwards & Bond, 2011) do not look to the long term either, but simply the next election. Through these failures of participation,

citizens and stakeholders have found that their expectations of being heard and involved are not being met. The message here is that citizens and stakeholders are not able to share power with the planning authorities in planning processes.

Both of the threads above (legitimacy and un-met expectations) have several things in common – trust and power. Dunn et al. (2008) note that trust is a component of process legitimacy while Möllering (2005) and Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa (2005) note that as a generalisation, trust involves the meeting of expectations (with mistrust the non-meeting of expectations). Parsons (1986) and Misztal (1996) both note in general that legitimacy is closely linked to trust. Trust is a powerful phenomenon that can have far-reaching consequences for citizens, stakeholders and government involved in planning. Bijlsma-Frankema & Woolthuis (2005) note that trust is a superior form of governance than control, however, in terms of planning practice, this form of governance has not been adopted or trialed.

Trust as an institution

Approaching this idea from a normative direction, trust in (participatory) planning could become an institution. For this paper, I use a very broad understanding of norms and the normative approach. Norms can be simply the implicit or explicit laws that govern the behaviours of society or the community. These don't have to be legislated laws, they can be actions or values that are promoted in society and after repeated 'use', become universally socially accepted. The normative approach simply suggests that the values and actions that society considers ideal are encouraged and acted upon over time. As these values and actions are enacted over time, they become institutionalised in society, where Berger & Luckman (1967: 54) describe institutions as "stable patterns of social interaction" that come out of recurring encounters between individuals.

The social relations (actions) that result in trust (a value) could be quite easily institutionalised through repeated enactment. The actions or relations that work towards building trust include 'getting to know each other', knowledge sharing, dialogue, time and meeting expectations (Edwards, 2009). Citizens and stakeholders who are generally active in a community may know of each other, if not actually knowing each other through their active involvement. Those citizens and stakeholders who are not active or have most of their social interactions outside the community in question therefore may not be known. However, this is not the only building block of trust, although having something in common and knowing each other makes the development of trust much more likely (Uslaner, 2002).

Sharing of information and understanding where each citizen, stakeholder or government agency is coming from is another building block in the development of trust. Currently, parties may share information (informing or consulting on Arnstein's ladder), but there is only limited use of the information, and often no deeper understanding of why different actors have these views or how the knowledge that they have has come about. Sharing and understanding of knowledge comes

about through both dialogue and the amount of time that individuals spend together. Through dialogue and self reflection, citizens, stakeholders and government agencies have the capacity to gain a deeper understanding of others, as well as their positions and understandings as related to the others (Foucault, 1990; Edwards, 2009). While the amount of time that individuals spend in each other's company is important (Uslaner, 2002; Uslaner and Richardson, 2003), Edwards (2009) found that while the amount of time is important, how that time together is spent is also important. Getting to know people in a more social setting rather than simply a 'work' or 'official' setting is of great importance.

One of the most important actions that can be undertaken with respect to developing trust is the meeting of expectations. It can be seen allegorically through the following description. As someone who is willing to trust another, I make my expectations of what I want done clear to them. At that point, I have taken a 'leap of faith' – jumping out over the chasm-line unknown. If the other person does what I have asked them to do, they have positively met my expectations – I land on solid ground on the other side of the chasm. The next and subsequent times I take this leap of faith and find that my expectations are met by this person, the leap becomes smaller and smaller. I am building up a trust relationship with this person. However, should I take the leap of faith and find that they have not met my expectations, I don't land happily on the other side of the chasm, I fall into it, severely injuring myself. In this instance, I have been 'hurt' – my expectations have not been met. Because there is no meeting of positive expectations, I may give them one or several more chances, and start to build up distrust as they are unable to meet my expectations.

If we focus on this key aspect of positively meeting expectations, if citizens and stakeholders clearly let planners and politicians know what they want to see in the community and the planners and politicians get back in touch with the community through building up an understanding and rapport with the community (which they lack), (c.f. Innes & Booher, 2004; Edwards & Bond, 2011), community-wide trust may be developed. However, there is still another 'force' at play that can cause problems – power.

Trust and power – a brief note

Starting with participation, communication is at the centre of the 'cutting edge' of deliberative participation (Edwards et al., 2008). Communication, which is also one of the building blocks of trust, is infused with the exercise of power. The exercise of power, in the form of communication adjuncts, such as eloquence, rationalization and charisma can also lend the appearance of legitimacy to the speaker and their information (Flyvbjerg, 1998). While this paper does not focus on the exercise of power per se, Stein & Harper (2003) claim that by focusing on power in participatory planning processes, there is a 'muddying of the waters' surrounding trust, however, participation and trust are intimately linked to the exercise of power (Edwards,

2009). In an overall sense, power must be incorporated into any broad analysis of participation and trust (c.f. Edwards, 2009).

Trust as a 'new' form of governance

Bijlsma-Frankema & Woolthuis (2005) re-propose trust as a global form of governance, although they note there are some serious difficulties as globalisation and neo-liberalism make their inexorable march and organisations move towards networks and alliances, they are less and less embedded in communities where social mechanisms to ensure trust is maintained. While the global is not embedded in communities, planning at the local community or neighbourhood level can still be considered embedded in their localities.

Trust, however, can and should be used to govern and develop appropriate and legitimate planning decisions and outcomes at the local level. Local officials and politicians are supposed to represent the interests of their department or their constituents, however, Edwards & Kleinschmit (in press) note that bureaucrats and politicians may, in the end, be more inclined to represent their own interests, party interests or other special interests rather than the interests of their departments or constituents. As Innes & Booher (2004) note, bureaucrats and politicians have become distant from the people they are 'working for', leading to citizens and stakeholders not having their expectations met, and ergo a decline in trust. The introduction of trust as a mode of governance would therefore require behavioural change on the part of the politicians and at the very least getting back to the fundamentals of representational democracy. This would require bureaucrats and politicians to listen to constituents and take into consideration their input.

Best practice would be 'scale up' to at least the placation rung on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. While placation is still within the tokenism range, citizens and stakeholders are able to provide detailed input into a plan or policy, however the final decisions still rest with the bureaucrats and politicians, who ostensibly have a wider spatial and temporal view than the community. This can help prevent fragmentation within and between urban areas.

A case in point is the Gold Coast Waterfuture process and other community engagement processes hosted by the Gold Coast City Council. While the decision-makers still retain the final authority to approve a plan or policy, citizens and stakeholders have been able to provide input and influence the final plan, generally shaped to the wants and needs of the community (Edwards, 2009). Edwards (2009) found that on the whole, the community trusted the City Council and its organisations to listen and incorporate citizen and stakeholder input to city planning decisions.

Conclusion

The focus on participatory governance in planning in order to get more legitimate planning decisions has not been the panacea that many authors have held it up to be. This paper and others detail many failures of both the processes used in participation and in participation itself. These failures of participation have led to unmet expectations and distrust of planners and politicians on the part of citizens and stakeholders. Power relationships between citizens, stakeholders and government officials play an important role in participation, trust and governance in local planning.

Trust has previously been proposed as an institution for governance by a number of authors, although not specifically in planning at the local level. Trust as a form of governance has been 'forgotten' in favour of more control-based mechanisms due to the increasingly globalised and networked society we have. However, at the local government or community level, there is still space for trust to become the governance institution of choice. There is great opportunity for citizens, stakeholders and government officials to interact, share knowledge and understandings and engage in dialogue to eventually to positively meet each others' expectations, leading to the development of trust.

One way forward is through getting back to the basics of representational democracy, where decision-makers represent the views, values, wants and needs of the community, rather than representing their own views, those of special interests or party interests. This may be possible through the elimination of party politics at the local level. This is one possible reason why the (previous) Gold Coast City Councils have such a deeply intstitutionalised participatory planning regime, that while only at the placation rung, still engenders trust – the Gold Coast City Council has been run by independent councilors, not representing any particular political party.

With some hard work on the part of citizens, stakeholders, bureaucrats and politicians, trust can become a governance institution for community planning.

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